

**A PAN-CANADIAN RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR MORE INCLUSIVE
SCHOOLS IN CANADA:**

THE DIVERSITY AND EQUITY RESEARCH BACKGROUND

A discussion paper prepared for the Canadian Education Statistics Council at the request of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, to guide the direction of the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda

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Abstract

This discussion paper presents four research questions as possible priorities for all partners in Canada. These questions reflect the interests and priorities already identified by respondents from provincial/territorial ministries and departments. The paper reviews the research that has already been done under each of the four theme areas, providing sub-headings that suggest the range of key issues. Discussion highlights omissions, new directions, and strengths and weaknesses in the assembled research in Canada.

Question one asks if a pan-Canadian research program could help describe different, effective approaches to Aboriginal-controlled schooling that other Aboriginal communities could learn from. Major sub-headings include: issues of Aboriginal control; policies for language and cultural revival; and Aboriginal teacher education. Further related issues are raised under questions two and three.

Question two asks if a pan-Canadian research program could help ministries and departments ease the integration difficulties presently experienced by culturally different children in school systems. Major sub-headings here include: fair assessment of student ability and achievement; English-as-a-second-language/French-as-a-second-language (ESL/FSL) versus bilingual education provisions; problems of bias in textbooks and in classroom discourse; bias against non-standard language varieties; and racial bias.

Question three asks if a pan-Canadian research program could help reduce disparities in access to academic literacy among different social, cultural, and regional groups. It reviews the limited survey data available, and the few contextual studies in Canada on literacy and illiteracy.

Question four asks if policy implementation research could help in the design, review, adjustment, and coordination of more equitable educational policies across Canada.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

"What pan-Canadian research program would help identify and describe different, effective approaches to Aboriginal-controlled schooling that other Aboriginal communities could learn from?"

Literature Background to Question 1

This question seems the most pressing issue because ministry and department officials in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North West Territories (NWT), Quebec, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador all rated it as a priority area for policy research. This priority is in line with the Royal Commission's recommendation that "education in all its dimensions be placed under the control of Aboriginal people" because it is "a core area of self-government jurisdiction" (Canada, 1996: 560).

Aboriginal control and Aboriginal involvement in decision making

The context of dominant culture schooling itself seems discontinuous with the discursive practices, the cultural knowledge, and the definitions of personal success that many Aboriginal children acquire and value in their communities. Aboriginal achievement rates in urban settings suggest this. Yau, Cheng & Ziegler (1993) report that Aboriginal students are by far the highest risk group at secondary level, with nearly half not accumulating enough academic credits to graduate, compared with only a quarter of other students who are 'at risk'. And this disparity grows worse in rural areas, because the Aboriginal dropout rate markedly increases outside cities (Mackay & Myles, 1989).

To address these inequities, progress has occurred in many areas of Aboriginal control of education following the key paper, 'Indian Control of Indian Education' (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Yet, in important areas that touch directly on cultural renewal and language revival, there is still much to be done.

The variety of recent research addressing this question is indicative of the variety of Aboriginal peoples and distinct indigenous cultural conditions in Canada. The research is very rich in certain areas, but in other areas there is little research-based evidence. And there is still little material written by Aboriginal peoples themselves, which means less material possessing the unique cultural authority that appropriate cultural membership can bring to writing. This reflects the cultural distance that still separates dominant-culture institutions from most Aboriginal peoples themselves.

Battiste (1998), Ryan (1996), Heimbecker (1994), Pence et al. (1992), Dorais (1992), Bouvier (1989), Maheux (1989), Burnaby (1987), Cummins (1987a), Toohey (1985a) and the contributors to Battiste & Barman (1995) all see Aboriginal control of their own institutions, and of the knowledge taught within them, as basic to any kind of reform aimed at reversing the common practices of deculturation and language-stripping. Dorais, for example, compares the relatively greater educational autonomy and collective rights of the Inuit in Greenland, with the position of Canada's Inuit. He draws a direct link between this autonomy and the relative strength of the Inuit language and culture in Greenland.

More specifically, Battiste (1998) targets funding agreements that require Aboriginal communities to accept provincial/territorial curricula that are culturally biased and inadequate in meeting Aboriginal needs. Burns (1998a; 1998b) argues that Aboriginal voices are excluded from mandated school councils; he also concludes that tuition agreement schooling will continue to be non-inclusive, racist, discriminatory, and assimilative in practice. He recommends changes in the culture of domination of school board systems (also see Tsuji, 1998). Common & Frost (1994) draw attention to the desperate consequences for Aboriginal groups of inequitable school board policies.

Others offer examples of devolved control. For example, Pence et al. (1992) describe the culturally appropriate early childhood and youth programs in the Meadow Lake tribal community in Saskatchewan where a bicultural approach gave students knowledge and skills for working effectively in their own culture and in the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. In British Columbia, Gardner (1986) reviews the unique features of the Seabird Island, band-controlled school with its strong policy to involve the community (also see Csapo & Clarke, 1984; Hébert, 1984; McKay & McKay, 1987).

Since 1990, the Ontario Ministry has collaborated with the Federation of Indian Friendship Centres to create alternative secondary schools in three Centres. Each is linked to an existing high school for accreditation and counselling. Teachers from the local board visit the Centres, where the school day includes Aboriginal perspectives and traditional ceremonies. Daycare is provided for young mothers. Although the dropout rate is less than 10 per cent in each Centre, and there is a waiting list of new students, expansion is delayed by uncertainties over government changes to educational governance (Lickers, 1998).

As a prerequisite to change, Dorais (1990) and many others mentioned below, call for

political autonomy for Aboriginal communities as a first step, along with official recognition of their languages and protection for their cultures.

Educational policies for language and cultural revival

Many writers in the last decade offer recommendations, management plans, and research directions as a basis for designing policies to promote language and cultural revival. Below I try to collate some of the substance of these recommendations.

Annahatak (1994) stresses the need for Aboriginal schools to find ways for their students to learn two cultures: the dominant European and the Aboriginal. The one leads to an understanding of traditional things that are important for group identity, while the other offers greater levels of empowerment in the wider world. Lickers (1988) recommends the incorporation of Aboriginal language courses as part of the regular elementary school day, while Elofson & Elofson (1988) call for less emphasis on French whose relevance to the reality of [Albertan] Aboriginal students they question.

Ten years after the Assembly of First Nations (1988a; 1988b) called for policies to ensure the survival and revitalization of Aboriginal languages, a desperate need for more resources still exists (see also Drapeau & Corbeil, 1992; Brady, 1991; and Ahenakew, 1988). Kirkness (1989a; 1989b) calls for an Aboriginal language foundation to distribute funds for community language initiatives and to oversee developments. There is a great need for carefully managed language planning aimed at language revival. At present, Canada has no such facility and none is in the planning stages.

School level research

At community levels, Maina (1997) calls for culturally relevant pedagogy that will build on the cultural identities of Aboriginal children (also see Corenblum, 1996; and Stairs, 1996). Ryan (1996) wants disabling school hierarchies removed, more flexible space and time arrangements, and changes in student assessment. Where languages are at risk, Armstrong (1993) recommends targeting the language of people intermediate in proficiency to build higher levels of fluency, as a model of use.

Hull, Phillips & Polyzoi (1995) examine the special education needs of five band-operated schools in Manitoba. They find problems in the development, monitoring, and operation of

special education programs for these schools, functioning as they do in isolation from wider system planning and monitoring. They also report a low identification rate of special education students. Drapeau & Corbeil (1992) offer an action plan that extends language transmission beyond the school.

Program coordinators consulted by me in the Northwest Territories in late 1998, favour the approach to band ownership used by the Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton (Martell, 1993; Battiste, 1987; 1998). The appeal here is that the school is situated within a larger sense of community. The Elders influence the education process, which is Mi'kmaq in values and practices.

Aboriginal languages: teaching vehicle or curriculum subject

Many studies review the operation of exemplary school language programs (see Symons & Thompson, 1994). Heit & Blair (1993) examine the language needs and characteristics of Saskatchewan Indian and Métis students. Pence et al. (1992) describe the processes in Saskatchewan to develop appropriate early childhood and youth programs in the Meadow Lake tribal community. Feurer (1993) reviews changes to the Cree Way program which had a wide impact on the community. Blondin (1989) describes the Zhati Koe language program in the Northwest Territories, which also receives high community support.

Brossard (1990) décrit une école Montagnaise québécoise. Cette communauté a pris en main le système scolaire. Maintenant à cette école les programmes d'études du ministère de l'éducation sont enseignés ainsi que la langue et la culture montagnaise. Aussi au Québec, Drapeau (1984) décrit un projet pédagogique chez les Montagnais, basé sur des sondages de la communauté qui désire que les élèves maintiennent leur langue et leur culture. Herodier (1992) offers a status report on the Cree School Board's language curriculum in Quebec. More than a decade ago, Shkilnyk (1986) reported Quebec as the only province where a pattern of decline in Aboriginal languages had been reversed.

Regnier (1987) describes Indian survival schools in Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Vancouver which confront the cultural alienation, social suffering, academic exclusion and political marginalization of Aboriginal peoples. McCaskill (1987) also describes the roles of survival schools. Their purpose is to promote language, values, and history so that the distinct cultures can survive within the larger society.

Dorais (1995) stresses the crucial role language plays in Inuit culture. Dorais (1990) and Creery (1994) review the changes that have occurred in Inuit education since the 1970s, including factors that help erode Inuktitut. In the Baffin Divisional Board of Education (1989), the Piniqtaqvut program aims to provide bilingual skills and biliteracy in Inuktitut and English while stressing Inuit beliefs and values.

McIntyre (1990) describes an Ojibwe-as-a-second-language initiative in Ontario whose success is attributed in part to local ownership of the project through all stages. Toohey (1985b) looks at the oral English proficiency of Ontario Cree students who arrive in schools speaking largely their own language, but who are mainly educated in English. She compares this proficiency with that of other Aboriginal students in Ontario and argues that early instruction in the Aboriginal language would improve official-language learning.

Despite these many developments, a survey by Kirkness & Bowman Selkirk (1992) found only a third of the 458 schools reported an Aboriginal language offered as a subject, but fewer than four per cent of schools reported use of an Aboriginal language as a medium of instruction. Meanwhile language loss in the face of inadequate policies is widely reported, most recently by Blair (1997). Another survey of schools in Saskatchewan (Littlejohn & Fredeen, 1993) found that only 61 out of 327 had some type of Aboriginal language program, ranging from classes in an Aboriginal language to use of a language as the main language of the school. Clearly the low representation of Aboriginal languages in mainstream schools justifies the Royal Commission's search for greater autonomy.

Aboriginal teacher education

Full Aboriginal control depends on a ready flow of Aboriginal teachers. The Royal Commission gave weighty support to Aboriginal teacher education by allotting five recommendations to it (Canada, 1996: 3.5.14 to 18). Kirkness (1989a; 1989b) highlights its importance and sets out the requirements of such a program. McAlpine et al. (1990) describe collaborative approaches to teacher education between First Nations school boards and a university. Williams & Wyatt (1987) describe another training program with an Aboriginal language component geared towards the needs of the community.

Hesch (1995) talks to Métis teachers-in-training, seeking their views on their training. Weber (1996) describes the genial and collaborative atmosphere in which Baffin Island's

novice teachers receive their training. She hopes that her work will influence policy elsewhere in Canada. Colwell & Wright (1992) describe efforts in the NWT to train Inuit early childhood teachers; and McNaughton & Stenton (1992) see literacy in both English and Inuktitut as a focal point of Inuit early childhood teacher training.

Au Québec, Larose (1984) donne trois principes de bases, dites conditions minimales pour permettre une amérindianisation réelle de l'école. Mazurek et Mokosch (1989) en discutant de la situation de l'ouest canadien, présente 20 recommandations pour l'amélioration de la formation initiale du personnel enseignant. Ces recommandations mettent beaucoup d'emphasis aux questions de maintien et de revitalisation de la langue et de la culture autochtones (voir aussi Kirkness, 1986).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

"What pan-Canadian research program would help ministries and departments ease the integration difficulties presently experienced by culturally different children in school systems?"

Literature Background to Question 2

Fair assessment of student ability and achievement

Studies confirm that teachers and other professionals often make incorrect assessments of student abilities because of cultural and language differences. This is more likely to occur when the distance between the teachers' culture and the children's is greater, and when norms for tests are based on samples culturally and linguistically remote from the students being assessed.

Senior (1993) reviews controversies about the use of standardized tests with Aboriginal students, leaving little doubt that the practices of assessors have had an inequitable impact on Aboriginal peoples generally. Goldstein (1988) and Common & Frost (1988) question the appropriateness of different intelligence tests normed for different cultural groups in North America.

Li (1994) discusses equity issues in assessment generally, decrying the excessive reliance on large-scale testing programs, using norm-referenced, 'objective', standardized achievement

tests, typically in multiple-choice format. She notes that school dropout rates are higher for students from linguistic minorities with limited dominant language skills which suggests schools in Canada are not responsive to the needs of the diverse populations they serve. She also points to the detrimental effects of testing programs that create no dialogue between the assessed and the assessor. Elsewhere she recommends a more ecological approach (1992).

Friesen (1997) discusses 'giftedness' as applied in a minority context. He calls for a reworking of the concept. Corson (1998a) wonders if the very idea of 'intelligence' that lies behind so much dominant-culture testing is becoming obsolete. It is hard to see so culturally relative a concept being translated from culture to culture with much consistency, especially as our realization grows that 'intelligence' is really an expression of people's skill in handling discourses within cultural meaning systems of different kinds. Bernhard (1992) finds a link between standardized test procedures and cultural inequities in schooling systems that results from relying on a defective concept: 'a culture-free intellectual ability'. Lewis & Samuda (1989) present alternative approaches to the assessment of culturally different students, along with ways to minimize bias and train teachers to develop fairer assessment techniques and curricula.

Majhanovich & Majhanovich (1993) discuss equity issues in the assessment and placement of immigrants in a Toronto school board. Meanwhile Goldstein (1988) looks at Aboriginal assessment in a Vancouver board. Cummins (1987c) and Landry (1987) discuss the over-representation of minority children in classes for the 'learning disabled'. Cummins attributes this to the incorrect use of tests of psychological assessment with minority children.

Crago (1990) warns that commonly used assessment and intervention approaches do not suit language-impaired Aboriginal children. Cummins (1989) looks at wider issues in bilingual special education: the difficulty of distinguishing learning disabilities from second-language-acquisition problems; the development of non-discriminatory assessments; and the design of appropriate forms of pedagogy. Verones-Sims, Rodda & Stinson (1993) suggest strategies for helping culturally different children with specific reading difficulties.

ESL/FSL versus bilingual education provisions for immigrant students

A clear finding from an Ontario-wide survey of provisions and demands for ESL and ALF [Actualisation Linguistique en Français], is that most boards meet the heavy ESL and ALF demands they face without serious financial difficulties (Cumming et al., 1993). This prompts

the authors to wonder if boards are actually falling short of making their programs fully inclusive and equitable.

There is evidence that schools themselves are reluctant to change their practices to deal with language diversity, especially if their immigrant student enrolment is small (Echols & Fisher, 1992). Moreover there are differences between what policies dictate and what teachers really do in classrooms (Cray, 1997). Crucially, students themselves say that current ESL curricula, addressing only academic skills, do not provide enough support to help them integrate into school communities (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995).

The most pressing equity issue is how to support immigrant first languages alongside ESL/FSL language learning (Dotsch, 1992; Fraser, 1992; Houston, 1992; McMuter, 1992; Ouellet, 1992a; 1992b; Bain, 1993; Duquette, 1993; D'Onofrio, 1993). The evidence is clear that students benefit culturally, academically, and cognitively if their first languages are maintained up to middle childhood (see Cummins & Corson, 1997; Corson, 1999). There are two types of response in Canada: 'bilingual immersion education' that maintains the immigrant language and culture as far as possible; or 'heritage language programs' that maintain the first language of the child's cultural background to some extent, while allowing quick transition to an official language.

Bilingual immersion education

Only Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan offer formal bilingual immersion education where a minority language other than an Aboriginal or official language is used (McAndrew, 1987; Manitoba Ministry of Education and Training, 1992). Gillett (1987) argues that partial immersion programs like these are less expensive than heritage language programs. For this reason, and because of their educational effectiveness, he suggests an expansion of bilingual immersion education should be the next development in immigrant language education.

Heritage (International) Language programs

In Ontario, the heritage program mainly operates as an appendix to the regular school timetable. It has been a source of controversy since its introduction (Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Edwards, 1993). The ambivalence of the wider population towards the program fuels the controversy. Joshee & Bullard (1992) report that a large majority of minority community members support heritage language diffusion and retention through the school, while the majority culture

population opposes this diffusion.

Regular teachers and administrators are often lukewarm about the programs, frustrated by the complexities of running them. But there are wider structural factors to do with racism and privilege that impact directly on the reception of these programs (Mallea, 1989; Edwards, 1993; Richards, 1991; Cummins & Danesi, 1990). And because most heritage language programs are offered outside normal school time, people tend to see them as only an educational frill.

At the core is the question of making the programs more meaningful and this already exercises the minds of teachers themselves. Feuerverger (1997) interviewed heritage language teachers in Toronto, highlighting their marginal existence and their search for more meaning in their work. Richards (1991) calls for more focussed research on the social consequences of these programs.

Au Québec, Latif (1990a; 1990b) présente les initiatives prises pour répondre aux besoins des allophones qui sont de plus en plus présents dans les écoles de langues françaises. De plus Québec a consacré de l'énergie et du financement pour des projets-pilotes en vue de développer des programmes d'alphabétisation pour les adolescents nouveaux arrivés qui sont sous-scolarisés. McAndrew (1991) compare les programmes et les politiques des programmes des langues d'origine au Québec et en Ontario.

Dealing with harmful forms of bias in school systems

Stereotypes and bias in textbooks and classrooms

Ryan (1998) surveys the taken-for-granted forms of negative stereotyping in the everyday practices of one school. But this bias is not always one way. In British Columbia, Myles & Ratzlaff (1988) find many teachers display a positive bias towards children described as European or Oriental, but a negative bias towards children described as native Indian. And even 'positive' stereotypes have negative effects on people. Maclear (1994) describes the problems journalists and editorial writers create for Asian children by over-emphasizing Asian academic success stories.

Part of the problem is teacher ignorance of the diversity of aboriginalities and cultures they are asked to deal with. Fossey (1991) argues that without a good understanding of [Aboriginal] cultures, educators can hardly present [Aboriginal] issues fairly and without stereotyping. The

effects on Aboriginal children are many. Corenblum & Annis (1987) indicate that stereotypical views produce conflicts for Aboriginal children in deciding between who they are and who they wish to be, contributing to later patterns of low self-esteem.

Looking at bias in textbooks, Ross (1991) discusses ways of detecting textual bias and evaluating the quality of books for use in classrooms. Rodriguez (1994) studied errors, omissions, and stereotypes in textbooks in Canada. In Ontario, Moore (1992) analyzes the structure, vocabulary, illustrations, and content of ministry/department approved textbooks, and finds that explicit bias still appears, despite claims to the contrary.

The equity implications here are clear. Stereotypes reinforced by authority figures like teachers, and circulated within high-status institutions like schools, go directly into the discourse of society creating the backdrop of meanings against which people have to live their lives. They create taken-for-granted injustices that the victims have little chance of resisting.

Bias against different discourse norms

Many of the difficulties in mainstream schools for minority students are due to sociolinguistic interference. People have expectations about context clues, the structuring of attention, the regulation of talk and turn-taking, and these are usually culturally specific. When people have their expectations about these things upset, then their ability and willingness to participate in the novel context is reduced.

Hearers vary in the way they focus their eyes and ears. In some cultures it is customary to show attention by looking at the speaker and in others by looking away. Those looking away in a classroom event may seem uninterested; elsewhere those staring seem rude. And teachers from one culture might not recognise when students from another culture are addressing or listening to them.

In Canada, a good research basis exists in this area for further policy studies. Crago (1992) discusses the incongruity between discourse in the homes of Inuktitut-speaking Inuit, and the discourses they encounter with non-Inuit ESL/FSL teachers (see also Oakes, 1988). The child is seen only as listener and observer, rather than as active participant in the process of learning. Whyte (1986) draws similar conclusions about possible mismatches in teaching Indian and Métis students. Darnell (1985) discusses different tendencies in communication norms between the Cree of Northern Alberta and Euro-Canadians. Ryan (1992; 1994) discusses differences in

discourse norms between Aboriginal communities, and those used in post-compulsory levels of education. These lead to difficulties for some senior-level Aboriginal students.

These studies themselves raise an equity issue: the risk of stereotyping students according to trends found in research (Corson, 1998a). Is it better for teachers to note the differences found and still try to treat children as if the differences did not exist? Or is it better (or even possible) for teachers to adjust their own interaction styles to suit norms of interaction for different groups of children? In general, the more knowledge teachers have about their students' likely norms of interaction, the more likely they are to make good choices in interacting from moment to moment. But teachers need to reflect on their own discourse norms, and ask whether culturally different children are receiving unintended messages as they interact with them.

Bias against non-standard language varieties

The non-standard language varieties of socially marginalized students are used inequitably as a guide to their potential. The literature in Canada on non-standard varieties falls under four broad headings, although actual research studies are rare.

(a) Non-standard French in minority francophone settings

Au Manitoba, Rodriguez (1993) affirme que les changements législatifs reconnaissant la langue française n'ont pu contrer les perceptions négatives de la part des manitobains et même des franco-manitobains envers la langue française. Aussi au Manitoba, Théberge & Lentz (1990) affirme qu'il est nécessaire de valoriser la langue maternelle, possiblement non-standard, tout en l'introduisant à l'usage de la norme. En Nouvelle-Écosse, Starets (1985) affirme que l'école acadienne devrait prendre la responsabilité d'enseigner le français acadien en plus du français standard. Il indique que ceci pourrait permettre aux acadiens de préserver leur patrimoine acadien et aussi servir d'instrument didactique pour l'apprentissage du français standard. En Ontario, Heller (1987b) indique que les élèves qui réussissent le mieux à l'école sont ceux qui maîtrisent les formes de français valorisées par l'école. Les élèves qui possèdent une variété non-standard sont souvent désavantagé.

(b) Non-standard English in majority anglophone settings

All the research here deals with speakers of Caribbean varieties. Ladson-Billings & Henry

(1990) describe ways in which successful teachers of Black students use Caribbean varieties of English to bridge the language of the home and the standard variety of English. Similarly Morrison, Luther & McCullough (1991) introduced a special program for young speakers of a Caribbean patois variety (see Coelho, 1988). Dei (1995a) mentions comments from Caribbean students about the tendency of schools to place them in English-skills development classes that stereotype them.

(c) Non-standard English/French used by Aboriginal peoples

In some places, a single Aboriginal language and French or English form a new variety of language, while elsewhere Aboriginal peoples live at a crossroads between both official languages and their ancestral language. The research is rather thin, but the educational effects can be very serious. Aboriginal students often arrive in schools speaking only their non-standard variety (Marcuzzi, 1986). When coupled with other differences and low teacher expectations, real difficulties result for them. Blair (1986) reports that older teachers support a deficit model of non-standard language, while younger ones support a difference model of non-standard language. Despite this, neither young nor old in her study will accept non-standard varieties from Aboriginal students in their classrooms. So, on a daily basis, students encounter teachers actively hostile to the chief marker of their identity as persons. The negative effects can be easily guessed.

(d) Non-standard varieties of immigrant languages

Many heritage language teachers have negative feelings about varieties. Wynnykyj (1993) looks at Ukrainian heritage language programs, and Fiorucci (1993) examines the varieties of Italian-speaking children. The teachers all give prejudiced, negative ratings to non-standard features (see too Danesi, 1985; Driedger & Hengstenberg, 1986).

Racial bias

Insights into the views of students themselves come from a major study of the impact of systemic racism on the readiness of students to dropout (Dei et al., 1995). Below I summarize the things students identified:

- teachers with low expectations of certain groups of children as students
- teachers ranked in the school hierarchy on the basis of the social status or abilities of their

students

- open teacher disrespect, especially using racially offensive remarks
- a sense of being overly visible or targeted for misconduct
- careless labelling of students by race
- deliberate teacher inaccessibility or lack of encouragement to the poor or the racially different
- alienating curricular content, with no representation of identities
- a sense of invisibility; that no one cares if certain students go or stay
- disciplinary methods like suspension from class for skipping classes
- teachers who avoid discussions of race and discrimination
- schools promoting competition rather than peer support groups

Many call for policy research on providing anti-racist forms of teacher education (Hesch, 1996; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996; Lund, 1998). Dei (1996) wants Afrocentric knowledge provided for students of every background, while James (1996) presents students' own views of African studies.

Dei & Razack (1995) offer an inventory of approaches for dealing with diversity in schools. Corson (1998b) also suggests a list of positive practices to balance the above list. Hébert (1992) concludes that policies of multicultural education contribute to pressures on minority children to assimilate. Stalikas & Gavaki (1995) find a strong relationship between the maintenance of ethnic identity, self-esteem, and high academic performance in the children of immigrants.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

"Can a pan-Canadian research program help reduce disparities in access to academic literacy among different social, cultural, and regional groups?"

Literature Background to Question 3

There is a shortage of contextual studies in Canada on this topic. As a result, the design, implementation, and evaluation of more equitable literacy policies is badly under-researched. A recent journal in Canada issue devoted to literacy issues (Malicky & Norton, 1998) contained nothing on policy or diversity issues, despite the evidently parlous situation for some groups.

In the International Adult Literacy Survey (Willms, 1997), Canada shows a much greater

literacy distribution than comparable countries. Large proportions here score at high and at very low levels, with students from poverty and relatively disadvantaged backgrounds scoring at markedly lower levels in all provinces (Canada, 1996b; OECD/HRDC, 1997). Meanwhile, at junior secondary level in Ontario, female students are performing much better than male students in reading and writing (Ministry of Education and Training 1995) with four times as many boys below the norm in reading.

Clearly then, poorer working class, inner-urban, Aboriginal, or remote-rural students are most at risk in Canada, with male students even more at risk than female. In Canada, among immigrants, the patterns are less clear. In the international study, immigrants score substantially lower in their ability to interpret and complete documents, but score much higher in prose literacy and quantitative literacy (Tuijnman, 1998).

Life experiences and sociocultural background affect children's success in academic (or school-type) literacy (Corson, 1995; 1998c). Vocabulary knowledge is the great variable in literacy success at senior levels. Many children develop vocabularies quite different from those valued in the school, and these correlate with parental levels of education and with quality of life generally (Stanovich and Cunningham, 1992; Wells, 1986; West and Stanovich, 1991).

Although early differences in literacy achievement increase with age, schools still do little to narrow those differences (Ceci, 1990; Cipielewski and Stanovich, 1992). Children from affluent families get early advantages in learning the foundation vocabulary, and they keep on getting them.

Reading experience does a great deal to build necessary knowledge bases, but children acquire the academic vocabulary range necessary for school success by taking part orally in the discourses of a literate culture (Olson 1997; Corson, 1995). For many children, family economic circumstances stand in the way of this, so inevitably poverty itself needs to be addressed in literacy policies. Levin (1995) and Corson (1998b) suggest areas for change in literacy policies.

Contextual studies on literacy and illiteracy in Canada

Stairs (1990) reports a positive relationship between the quality of Inuktitut writing and children's writing in English a year later. This result is consistent with bilingual education findings in other parts of the world (Cummins & Corson, 1997) and it points directly towards

policy reforms.

The severity of illiteracy among official-language minorities has attracted interest in the last decade. Wagner (1991) reports francophone official-language minority groups at a particular disadvantage. Illiteracy levels among franco-ontarians are about twice those of the anglophone population. Linguistic assimilation seems a major factor; and three types of functional illiteracy can result:

- some students become illiterate in both French and English
- some become only partially literate in both
- some become illiterate in the minority French but literate in English

This work by Wagner seems very important for a discussion of equity and minority literacy generally. It identifies an important social mechanism that lies between the pressures on most minorities to assimilate, and the low success rates of students (also see Cazabon, 1997).

Reducing assimilatory pressures on minority language speakers

Aboriginal and francophone minorities are heavily affected by unfair assimilatory pressures. Landry, Allard & Th  berge (1991) recommend complete minority control of institutions to ensure a maximum number of contexts where minority mother tongue usage is encouraged. Lack of prestige for a language causes its speakers to assimilate to the dominant language, leading to the three illiteracies Wagner identifies.

Lack of home support also promotes assimilation. Schools cannot replace the family's role in language vitality (Churchill, Frenette & Quazi, 1985). Landry & Allard (1987) indicate that without a dynamic curriculum that promotes belief in the language's value, assimilation is inevitable. Recent francophone research underlines these claims (see Bernard, 1997).

Gingras (1993) est not   que tant que l'environnement social, le milieu familial et l'  cole pousse dans la m  me direction, il y a possibilit   de r  sistance    l'assimilation. Heller (1987a) aussi conclut que les   coles jouent un r  le important dans le maintien ou la dissolution des barri  res sociales qui assurent la survie d'une minorit   (voir aussi G  rin-Lajoie, 1996).

Meanwhile, the pressures on immigrant minorities to assimilate can also cause hardship, racial tensions in schools, and a sense of inequity (Talbani, 1993). Again the point emerges

that where minority languages are used as vehicles of instruction, literacy levels in both languages improve.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

"Can policy implementation research help in the design, review, adjustment, and coordination of equitable educational policies across Canada?"

Literature Background to Question 4

Few research studies examine formal processes of policy design, implementation, and evaluation in contexts in Canada. This seems to be a general weakness in educational research here, matching weaknesses noted elsewhere in the world but which researchers are already rectifying. In Canada, the beginnings of research on policy design, implementation and evaluation still lie in the future.

Policy Evaluation

Some see evaluations of language and culture programs as a pressing need. In Saskatchewan, Ahenakew calls for more program evaluation and more studies of policy quality control generally: "We never know if they failed or if they ceased due to financial cutbacks" (1988: 54). Some of the exceptional studies are all evaluations of minority language programs.

Hoover & the Kanien'kehaka Raotitiohkwa Cultural Center (1992) evaluate a Mohawk immersion program for children near Montreal. The Kativik School Board evaluates its entire educational program (1992) but looks specifically at language issues. Their report is highly critical of provisions generally. Burnaby (1988) reports an evaluation of Immigration Canada's 'Settlement Language Training Program', reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the policy and drawing conclusions for the future.

Policy Gaps

Elsewhere researchers note the absence of policies. A study of school boards in Ontario finds few with policies for non-sexist education, and those that have them limit their policies to employment equity (Gilbert, 1990). King (1991) wants individual schools to have a policy statement against sexism, while Rezai-Rashti (1994) argues for more democratic policies and structures to combat the gendered racism of the school. Stevenson (1992) reports that the most

innovative programs and materials all come from the US or the UK and are not easily accessible. What happens in Canada (Ontario) is very informal and low profile. The text of the Royal Commission on Learning in Ontario (1994) bypasses sex and gender entirely in its general discussions and in its recommendations.

Echols & Fisher (1992) look at the implementation of educational policies on diversity and other issues. They find little centralized planning for implementation, and an absence of policy monitoring and evaluation. At school level, they find policies having little impact despite administrators saying they have been implemented. In Quebec, McAndrew & Lamarre (1996) lament the absence of a comprehensive intercultural policy to ease the introduction of immigrants into French-language schools.

What policy implementation research needs to reveal is that policies are addressing the needs of all the people they aim to address. It needs to show what has to be done to improve implementation processes; it needs to reveal when policies are missing the mark. To be effective, this kind of research cannot be conducted by survey from a capital city office. It needs to examine the micro-contexts of implementation, using careful, ethnographic approaches to see if planned reforms are truly reaching those who live in remote areas, or those who inhabit marginal cultural and social spaces.

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